

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 071

CS 204 225

AUTHOR Andrew, Josef; And Others  
TITLE Twenty-two Young Indiana Writers; Winners of the  
National Council of Teachers of English 1977  
Achievement Awards.  
INSTITUTION Ball State Univ., Muncie , Ind. Dept. of English.  
PUB DATE May 78  
NOTE 45p.  
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$2.06 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Awards; \*Composition (Literary); Diaries; Essays;  
\*High School Students; Poetry; Short Stories;  
\*Writing  
IDENTIFIERS \*Indiana; National Council of Teachers of English;  
\*Student Writing

ABSTRACT

The 24 pieces in this collection were written by the 22 Indiana high school students who were among the winners in the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) 1977 Achievement Awards competition. The selections include impromptu themes written on a topic assigned by NCTE, as well as samples of the students' essays, short stories, poems, and journal entries. (GW)

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# Twenty-two Young Indiana Writers

Winners of the NATIONAL COUNCIL of TEACHERS of ENGLISH  
1977 ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

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*published by Ball State University*

*Muncie, Indiana*

*May 1978*

CS204225

## PREFACE

For the sixteenth consecutive year, the English Department of Ball State University, in cooperation with the National Council of Teachers of English, is pleased to offer a sampling of work done by Indiana's twenty-two winners in the NCTE's Achievement Awards competition. The Awards have brought past years' finalists opportunities for admissions and scholarships at colleges and universities they otherwise might not have been able to attend. And Ball State University, through *Twenty-two Young Indiana Writers*, adds its recognition to that which the successful contestants receive from other sources. In addition, however, Ball State believes that this publication, by encouraging students to enter the competition and by providing samples of good high school work in English, can be a stimulus to better writing in Indiana.

To participate in the competition, high school juniors submit a sample of their writing and produce a sixty-minute impromptu theme on a topic assigned by the National Council. The 1977 participants were asked to write on the following subject:

When we look forward to and then actually enter into new experiences, we often do so with particular expectations. We look forward to success, satisfaction, fulfillment, and the like. Select one experience which, for you, turned out to be different from what you expected, better or worse, but different. Tell what expectations you had and how you arrived at them. Describe the experience itself as vividly as you can. Tell what the difference has meant to you.

Both of the types of writing are represented in this issue of *Twenty-two Young Indiana Writers*.

I wish to express my thanks to the National Council and its Executive Secretary, Robert Hogan; to Sister Rosemary Winkeljohann, Director of the Achievement Awards program; to the Ball State University Publications Office for help in producing *Twenty-two Young Indiana Writers*; to Professor Daryl B. Adrian, Chairman of the English Department at Ball State, for his support of the project; and especially to the authors whose work is represented in this publication.

Howard K. Nixon, Jr.  
Associate Professor of English

## CONTENTS

|                                                                    |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                    | 5  |
| Josef Andrew, Wayne High School, Fort Wayne                        |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Allen Peters                                   |    |
| TWO POEMS .....                                                    | 6  |
| Julie Ann Aydt, Marian Heights Academy, Ferdinand                  |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Sister Paulette Seng                           |    |
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                    | 7  |
| Suzanne M. Berry, Saint Joseph High School, South Bend             |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Jane Syburg                                    |    |
| DARWIN REVISITED .....                                             | 9  |
| Perry Carl Donham, Terre Haute North Vigo High School, Terre Haute |    |
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                    | 9  |
| Kathleen M. Dugan, Columbus North High School, Columbus            |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Shirley A. Syster                              |    |
| UNDER THE GOLDEN ARCHES .....                                      | 12 |
| Dale Eckart, Warren Central High School, Indianapolis              |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Sandy Miller                                   |    |
| ANGER OF A HOUSE .....                                             | 16 |
| Tamara Jane Engle, Thomas Carr Howe High School, Indianapolis      |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Shirley Neal                                   |    |
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                    | 19 |
| Darryl Robert Erlandson, Chesterton High School, Chesterton        |    |
| REQUIREMENTS .....                                                 | 20 |
| Kurt David Gardner, LaSalle High School, South Bend                |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Margaret Myers                                 |    |
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                    | 24 |
| Julie Marie Gibson, Broad Ripple High School, Indianapolis         |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Doris M. Bradford                              |    |
| THE CONDITIONING OF A MIND (Impromptu) .....                       | 25 |
| Patrick E. Gipson, Warren Central High School, Indianapolis        |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Sandra Miller                                  |    |
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                    | 26 |
| Peri Gruber, Wayne High School, Fort Wayne                         |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Allen Peters                                   |    |

|                                                                  |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| SHORT STORY .....                                                | 27 |
| Bruce W. Humphrey, Clay High School, South Bend                  |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Stella Thomas                                |    |
| TWO POEMS .....                                                  | 29 |
| Mike Leslie, Mitchell High School, Mitchell                      |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Kathy McCracken                              |    |
| AN ENCOUNTER (Impromptu) .....                                   | 31 |
| Judy Miller, Mitchell High School, Mitchell                      |    |
| VICTORY (Impromptu) .....                                        | 32 |
| Michael Morris, Warren Central High School, Indianapolis         |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Sandra Miller                                |    |
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                  | 33 |
| Mark Allen Oates, Chesterton High School, Chesterton             |    |
| TRAPPED! .....                                                   | 35 |
| Christopher Michael Rigaux, Saint Joseph High School, South Bend |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Jane Syburg                                  |    |
| A STAR IS BORN .....                                             | 36 |
| Kathy Lee Sands, F. J. Reitz High School, Evansville             |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Sharon Tuggle                                |    |
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                  | 39 |
| Tabitha J. Sparkes, Madison Heights High School, Anderson        |    |
| IMPROMPTU .....                                                  | 41 |
| Louis Scott Warren, Portage High School, Portage                 |    |
| THE DEVIL'S MESSENGER .....                                      | 42 |
| David Alan Wickizer, Thomas Carr Howe High School, Indianapolis  |    |
| Sponsoring teacher: Bruce Beck                                   |    |

## IMPROMPTU

Josef Andrew

My grandfather would gently stroke my baby-blond hair, as he rocked me back and forth in his old walnut rocker. His hands were always clean but deeply grooved by age. The deep lifeline valleys and the blue vein mountains all cut and swirled into his flesh, in the same rhythm and color as the walnut grain of the rocker. Both were carried by age and experience, both tanned with knowledge. He would untangle my hair and slur over and over, "You'll be a good man Joey—a good man."

Ever since then I have looked forward to that discernable, misty line that you stepped over and became a man. I knew that once I was a man, I could ride a two-wheel bike and could stay up late. When I became a man, I would be proud: I would stand up for what I believed in; I would fight for my honor; I would march through life with ticker-tape, pomp, and glory, my proud boots smashing those little, unimportant things in the way—then those failures of humans, the groundlings that littered my stage, where I acted out the soap opera games of life.

I remember the day that I learned to ride a two-wheel bike. All my friends had already learned, and they teased me continually. I was afraid I wasn't really a man if I never learned to ride a bike, or at least a weak one if I learned late. But I was afraid of the crystal sparkle of the sidewalk's cement even more. I was proud when I finally did learn and quickly showed my younger brothers and sisters. Their awed eyes almost convinced me that I was a man, but . . . A man was someone like my father, a demi-god; I wasn't yet *a man*.

I stand before a mirror; it reflects me, me as I am. Am I a man? I can ride a two-wheel bike. There's fuzzy hair on my chest. The government calls me a man, my parents call me a man, my girlfriend calls me a man. But where is my cause? Where is that idea, that philosophy that men grab and rant and rave about? Where is my revolution? What can I clutch before me and hold high and say, "This is what I believe in. This is what I will fight for."

Yes, I guess I am a man. I agree often with my teachers. I tend not to ask questions nor to wear my sandals that everyone but me hates. The glass of clear, iced water that flows through my lips is as liquid as I am. And when I shake it, dazed clouds appear, just like the smoke that hides my thoughts when I am shaken.

My grandfather is dead, propped up in a plastic bed, with plastic tubes running into his walnut hands, irrigating the ends of his lifelong valleys.

I hate boots.

I love those little failures of humans that have found an excuse for getting out of my annoying society. They have no cause, but they, unlike myself and my peers in suburbia, admit it.

My father and mother are divorced, demi-gods thrown off their pedestals, all glory and pomp shattered, blowing down cement highways, pushed by luck's sly winds. But the dusty pieces stop. They are driven against a fallen bicycle. The crystals wink into the sun-stroked chrome of its curved fender. And there, in a twisted reflection, is a man. He is a man because his knees are red and scraped, his hands rough, grooved from the crystal cement.

But an ice cream cone won't melt his tears. For he is a man, he remembers . . .

## TWO POEMS

Julie Ann Ayt

### Photomemories

You were a candymouthed, stickyfingered baby.  
I remember your Poohbear, happyeyed face,  
As it peered at me on a morningbright  
From between your wooden cribbage bars,

Your blondhaired, smilinglove hugs  
On greengrassed, sunshined park days,  
Those days of playfullaughingness,  
Of feeding pigeons featheredgrey.

We won fish at cottoncandied fairs;  
You toddled diaperfunny through the crowd;  
I followed you, enslaved by a tinyboy,  
Blinded by your goldenglow.

I took pictures of you, boypride, as you grew,  
Left canIhavethecar nights behind,  
As well as basketball, firstdates, childishthings.  
And soon you were a grownman.

Then you said that you were joiningthem,  
But said you would be back again,  
I believe that was the firstlie  
That you ever told me.

And you marched to a deathwar  
in a bloodyfield in Vietnam.

I look back with Photomemories,  
At you, child of my laughingleave,  
And selfish hottears flow again  
For a Poohbear, happyeyed baby,  
For a hatredbred, futiledeath war.

## Graffiti

Names scratched carefully, indelibly  
On the wooden surface of my desk.  
Love read those names of long-ago boys  
Forever and today.

I wonder what's become of them,  
Those young men no longer.  
Some no doubt are dead.  
War, a plane crash,  
An overdose, a rifle shot  
Have taken those long-ago boys.

Yet their names remain,  
Scratched carefully, indelibly,  
On the wooden finish of my desk,  
On the time-smoothed finish  
Of the memory of a long-ago girl  
And her long-ago dreams of love.

## IMPROMPTU

Suzanne M. Berry

One of the greatest satisfactions in life is to be able to make something with your own hands. Though I have never considered myself an artist, I have found on occasion the patience and ability to put together a masterpiece of sorts. Making little trinkets and kids' toys instills in me a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Since I babysit for many children, it is never hard to find a willing recipient for the goods which I produce. In one of the families with which I found myself frequently there were three little girls. These girls were basically nice, but, like all children, definitely had a savage side. It was these girls that strangely motivated me to take on the hardest craft work I had ever tried. The three girls, Elena, Francesca and Anna, were all terribly fond of dolls and frequently were bold enough to ask me for one. I felt that, as an act of sincere devotion to my job, I should satisfy the desires of the children. I bought wood and other materials to design and carve a set of dolls.

Following closely the plans for each doll, I spent every spare moment I could find carefully carving and perfecting the dolls. As I worked I often thought of the many other more productive things I could be doing, but

never failed to reassure myself that the toil I had undertaken was worthwhile. I day dreamed of the great joy the dolls would give to the girls and the great joy and satisfaction I would receive from seeing them play with my sculptures. I imagined hearing them brag to their parents and friends about their beautiful new dolls "that Suzy had made for them."

When I thought these thoughts it gave me great energy and I worked faster and harder. Totally absorbed in my work I often forgot to do my chores or meet my appointments. No one could understand my strange craving to perfect my beautiful homemade creatures. But they could not understand that I felt a closeness to the girls I babysat for and wanted to strengthen that closeness by presenting them with a piece of myself.

After three months of hard work, I finally completed the dolls. They stood about one foot high and were shaped in the correct proportions. The legs, arms, neck were attached in such a way that they could move properly but were not limp or loose. I had stained the wood and painted the faces so as to make them appear real. Also I had found clothes to fit each doll's imagined personality. Never had I seen dolls so beautiful, though I did not dare say this to anyone. When I asked around for opinions concerning the art work, all were forced to admit that the dolls were beautifully constructed and all expressed surprise that I had actually made them.

It took great will power to force me to give up these dolls which I had made. But I forced myself to think of how happy they were going to make those little girls. The next day when I went to babysit, I concealed the dolls in a bag, and after their parents had left, I gave each girl the doll I had made for her.

I was terribly shocked by their reaction. "What's this?" said Francesca. "Why do you think we want these?" said Ellie. Francesca screamed, "Yuk, we don't like wood dolls. They're hard and no fun to play with." Anna joined in, saying, "No one plays with dolls like these."

I couldn't believe my ears. "But, but . . .," I started, only to see it was no use, and I was a failure. The girls immediately dropped the dolls and went outside to continue the game they had been playing. I picked up a doll, and, though tears formed in my eyes, I vowed to make those girls appreciate my work.

In this I was unsuccessful. The next time I came to the house I inquired about the dolls. "They're in the basement," was the only reply I received from the three faces intently glued to the television set.

The basement was a dingy, dirty place, but I went there in search of my fallen solders. There I found them, twisted and broken, victims of the hard cement floor. It was too much for me, as though my own flesh and blood were lying there helpless and broken, the victims of carelessness.

This experience taught me that, even though someone ought to appreciate a gift, they don't always. Even though you make something that you think they will like, it may just be because you would like it. It also

taught me not to count on my work being appreciated and that if I really like something I have made, I should keep it for myself. I learned that kids cannot be expected to appreciate the fruits of labor, and that one who makes masterpieces cannot be conceited enough to expect praise. But most of all I learned how much I really didn't like those girls that I always had to pass my time with.

## DARWIN REVISITED

Perry Carl Donham

Went to the zoo yesterday  
And Stood for a moment  
At the monkey's cage.  
There were people  
Gathered around,  
Laughing and making  
Funny sounds at the monkey,  
Who was making  
Faces,  
Begging for attention.  
Then I looked into his eyes and  
Realized that it was really  
Me  
In the cage making  
Faces,  
Striving for acceptance.

## IMPROMPTU

Kathleen M. Dugan

Through the poem "Mending Wall" and the short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener," Frost and Melville show that by building too many walls one can isolate himself from the rest of humanity; thus it is necessary for one to realize why he builds walls. Firstly, walls can isolate an individual physically and psychologically. Everyone needs walls for physical privacy but not to the extent where one remains in seclusion. Although many people need psychological walls, a person should realize why he is building the wall so that he won't withdraw from society. Even though some walls can be "moved," it takes individuals from both sides "to move" the wall. Furthermore, because walls can cut an individual off from humanity it is necessary for that individual to realize *why* he builds walls. Therefore in

dealing with the concept of isolation, Frost and Melville show that walls can isolate one physically and psychologically, that walls can be "moved" if both sides are willing to break the barrier, and that one must realize *why* he builds walls.

To begin with, everyone understands the need for privacy that a wall can produce, but when taken too far, such walls can hurt a person. The wall between the two neighbors in the poem "Mending Wall" appears to be intentionally built so that each neighbor has his own privacy. But it seems as if the one neighbor lives secluded from the other because they never see each other except when the wall needs to be mended. The one neighbor says that walls make good neighbors, but it is hard to believe him because he barely knows his own neighbor. In "Bartleby, the Scrivener," the walls outside and inside the building in which Bartleby works are also built for privacy. But it seems that the walls around the building keep it isolated from the rest of the world. At either end of the building are contrasting walls, one white and one black. Both offer no signs of life except for the dim light that filters in from above. These walls offer no growth or interaction with the outside world; they are the barrier between growth and contact and create stagnation and decay. Though they don't isolate the workers as much as the outside walls, the sliding glass and the folding screen create a gap between the workers. The sliding glass and the folding screen are placed within the building by the narrator because he doesn't want to become entangled with the problems of the workers. He doesn't want to listen to the noise made by Nipper's irritable mornings and Turkey's bad afternoons or see the lifeless Bartleby write on mechanically. The involvement between the two sides is gone because of the physical barrier between. Therefore, through building walls one can isolate himself physically and psychologically—whether a need for such privacy truly exists or not.

Furthermore, although many people need psychological walls, they should realize why they are building walls, so they won't withdraw from society, as the mere enlightened neighbor describes his neighbor as being "... in the darkness ... not of woods only and the shades of trees." The other neighbor is psychologically in the dark: he cannot see or even question why he builds the walls; he just does so because his father said that good fences made good neighbors. In "Bartleby, the Scrivener," the Narrator "builds" a wall between himself and his workers. He doesn't want to confront their problems, because he doesn't want to become involved. This is shown when the narrator overlooks the problems of Bartleby "preferring not to" proofread papers and Turkey's "bad afternoons." The narrator suggests that Bartleby proofread and Turkey take the afternoon off; but when they say no, he stays away from the problems, not wanting to be involved. Bartleby, too, isolates himself by building a psychological wall between himself and humanity. Because he "prefers not to" do anything he builds a wall between himself and humanity. He doesn't involve himself

with others, and he reaches the point where he has no purpose in life, until he "prefers not to" live at all. It is just such psychological and physical walls that people build around themselves that cut them off from the rest of humanity.

In addition, even though some wall can be "moved," it takes individuals from both sides to break the barrier separating them. In the poem "Mending Wall" the wall between the neighbors is moveable in the sense that the two neighbors could take the stones down and break the barrier between them. But it takes both sides to move or break the barrier, and the one neighbor is unwilling to become involved. As with the poem "Mending Wall" the barrier between Bartleby and the narrator is also moveable. It is a folding screen which separates them literally, and it shows their non-involvement which separates them psychologically. Neither side really makes the effort to move the barrier between them, but by this time Bartleby "prefers not to" involve himself with others so much that the barrier still exists. Both walls were moveable in these instances, but one side was willing to break the barrier between them, so it still remains.

Because walls can cut an individual off from humanity, it is necessary for people to realize *why* they build walls. In the poem "Mending Wall," the one neighbor never realizes why he builds the wall except that his father had always told him that good fences made good neighbors; thus the neighbor keeps building the wall. The wall serves no purpose, as Frost points out when he says there are no cows to keep in or out. The wall is an obstruction between the two neighbors. In "Bartleby, the Scrivener," the Narrator realizes that people must understand why they build walls so that they don't become isolated like Bartleby. Seeing Bartleby gradually have no desire to live because of his isolation made the narrator realize that once a person breaks totally away from humanity, he really has no purpose in life; and this leads to his eventual death. Since walls can place barriers between individuals, it's important that people realize *why* they build walls.

Through walls people can isolate themselves physically and psychologically; yet some of these walls are moveable if both sides are willing to move the barrier. Also, people need to realize why they build walls, since walls can cut people off from humanity. Through the poem "Mending Wall" and the short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener" Frost and Melville show that by building up too many walls one can isolate himself from the rest of humanity, so that it is necessary one realizes *why* one builds walls.

## UNDER THE GOLDEN ARCHES

Dale Eckart

The footprints left by the two men on their way home were reminiscent of those left by astronauts on a moon shot that now seemed many years distant. These treadmarks, unlike their counterparts across the void, were soon erased by the autumn breeze which swept through the desolate city. Empty skeletons of buildings were strewn on both sides of the cracked thoroughfare, and the floors of all had been painted with an even coating of fine, gray dust. Brick and stone were dulled by radiation, age, and the relentless dust. Even the glory of a Midwest fall evening was nothing more than a uniform dimming of a featureless sky.

All the lines of age and decay that could be seen in the ruins were mirrored in the older man's face. His hair, long since stained gray from years of exposure to dust, was permanently tousled from the wind and restless fingers. The clothes he wore were relics of another time, a collection of Goodwill rejects obscured by the omnipresent ash. Yet despite twenty-five years of hardship, his blue eyes harbored the glowing embers of a hope, a dream that refused to die. Over the years his dream had grown until it possessed his entire being.

The old one dreamed of the Beforetime, as it was called. As a profitable business executive, he had seemingly been cut off by the war in the prime of life. He had been the toast of the town at fifty-five, and in the best of health. After the attack, however, he had not been quite the same. Often subject to wild delusions about Reconstruction, he would then sink into an abyss of depression. Yet between emotional peaks and canyons, his dream returned again: life as it once had been, with all its treasures and delights.

It was the constant remembering, the recounting of how he would rebuild it all that disturbed the young man. He was the son of one of the five children who survived the holocaust, and knew nothing of the Beforetime. The old man seemed to have a memory like that of an—an ellifunt? Most everyone in his family, including his five-year-old brother, could repeat the old man's tales and what he planned for each person to do in his great city. They had learned to humor him, to act attentive so that in a few minutes he would either fall asleep or one of them could enter the conversation and change the subject. The young man had learned to do this by nodding often and following the old man's arm as he pointed out various areas of interest along their way home. As the pair passed the ancient train station, the old man drew in a deep breath and began again.

"Ah, yes, the train station. Hundreds of trains passing through day after day, moving the people from place to place. 'All Aboard the 10:56 for Kokomo, Timbuktu, and Cuca Mongal' Huge gray land schooners they'll be, racing along the silver rails to my shining city. And what a city! And

slender radio towers, atop only the highest, to spread the news for miles upon miles. Maybe, just maybe, I'll bring back television. Though I don't know, I always liked to make up my own pictures. Do you ever made up your own pictures, son?"

"Well, sir, I often think about the Country: about who lives there, and whether it might not be better than here. Things like that."

"You just keep on doing that, boy. Did I ever tell you about how green the grass used to be out there? And the flowers?"

He had told the youth—many times, in fact—but he acted as though it was the first time the matter had been mentioned. "Flowers? No, I don't think so."

"I haven't? Well, my boy, you youngsters have certainly missed something by not having flowers around. A real pity we had to kill them all off. Flowers were just the thing to give to a lady friend. Your mother, for instance. Why, if I could, I'd give your mother a big bouquet of long-stemmed roses right now for all she's done for me. After all, she's fed me, taken me in . . ."

"Speaking of my mother, sir, don't you think we should be getting home? Dinner is probably ready now." Congratulating himself on an interruption well done, the young man took off in an easy lope towards his family's flat, leaving the old one to shuffle along and grumble under his breath about the lack of taxi service and how no old person will be forced to walk to dinner when he finally settles the score.

The old man pushed his chair back from the table as the woman began to clear away the meager flatware. It had been an average meal, neither extravagant nor rationed. The menu was basically the same as always: a few freshly-killed rodents or birds, two cans of preserved vegetables, all washed down with fresh water from the rain collector tank. On special occasions, an old bottle of wine was opened. The tableware, though chipped and tarnished, was in remarkably good condition considering the circumstances. The children were becoming uneasy, for a good meal always prompted one of two stories from the old one. Either his stay at the Waldorf-Astoria or the grandeur of his Catholic wedding would be laid out, followed by the menu of the Restaurant de Magnifique, which was the gastronomic center of his city. It seemed now that one particular item had caught his eye.

"A very fine dinner indeed. It's a pity, though, that we don't have any better silver than this. I suppose it was all we could salvage. You know, one can make some real nice things out of silver. Plates, spoons, knives, . . . the Waldorf-Astoria where I got married, now they had silver. And we'll have it too. Crystal goblets, silver trays, shining table service, all the best. But we wouldn't think of disgracing these fine utensils with second-rate food, now would we?"

The children alternately sat on their hands and chewed their fingernails. Two of the boys began shoving each other at the opposite end of

the table, but were quieted immediately by a scowl from their father. The old man rambled on, oblivious to his inattentive audience.

"... and for appetizers, imported melon, with perhaps some imported Russian caviar. Next, the greatest salad bar the world has ever known. A great mountain of lettuce, harvested that very day, garnished with a myriad of dressings, individually mixed to the customer's exact standards. And then, the entrees. It makes me shudder to even imagine it. Only the finest meats: pheasant under glass, filet mignon, lobster Newburg. Maybe..."

The young man was also nervous. He knew that this type of thing could go on for an hour or more, and the group was holding a Meeting tonight. Nervously removing his watch from its pouch in his trousers, he carefully pried open its delicate cover. It had been given to him upon his coming of age, since he was the eldest. The Meeting was due to start at any minute, and the family would take time to get moving. The other children had seen him look at his watch, and pleaded with their eyes for him to do something. Drawing a deep breath, the young man turned his full attention to the old man's speech as he searched for an opportunity to interrupt.

"... and Baked Alaska for dessert, just like after my wedding. Ah, it'll be a grand place, with silver furnishings..."

"About your wedding, sir. Were you married in a church?"

"Why, yes, as a matter of fact, I was."

"Was it much like the old one down the way?"

"Very much so. St. Paul's of Minneapolis, I think it was. Simply grand place, with its towering steeple pointing to the heavens. An awe-inspiring sight. I remember..."

"You know they're having a Meeting about the old church. I'll bet you'd like to hear what they plan to do about it."

The younger children took the opportunity to leap from the table, shouting their agreement. The mother, taken aback by this sudden show of enthusiasm for a usually boring affair, blinked twice to make sure it was true and picked up a coat to give to a delinquent youngster. The old man assured himself of how his planned mass transit system would make things easier for those not quite as fast as the rest and pulled on his tattered wrap as he headed for the door.

---

The meetinghouse had held meetings even before the war. It was in the ruins of the local high school gymnasium, with the speaker's platform being the remains of the scorer's table. Meetings were not called often, only for special events. Each small group or family unit would normally solve its own problems: those of food, clothing, and shelter. The leaders only called in when inter-family disputes erupted. The question under consideration tonight was a different matter.

St. Mary's Evangelical Church had been the religious center for the neighborhood before the war. The bombing and later storms broke in her windows and collapsed her steeple. The east wall had recently fallen, but

much of the interior remained intact. Most of the older ones wanted to retain the structure, since it held great sentimental value for them. The new generation, who knew not of the reverence and awe which was due to such an edifice, wanted to take what was valuable from the building and then known down what was left. It was one of these youths who was finishing his speech as the latecomers arrived.

The youth's voice drifted out over the night air to the young man and his family, but all ears, even the oldest, understood his words. "... so let me sum up what I have said. There are many useful things in the building: wood, metal, canned goods. The east wall is an ever-present danger to our children who play there. It serves no purpose as it is. Let us take action..."

Many shouts, both pro and con, filled the crowded hall. The chairman pounded his gavel, screaming above the uproar. One voice, despite its old and quavering tones, finally rose above the chaos of sound.

"Stop!" Listen to me! You've no idea what you're doing!"

The crowd began to still, and the old man rose to take the floor.

"That building is not just wood and stone," he began. "It is beautiful in its own right, for it embodies all our ideals. Everything of moral or aesthetic value is contained in that hallowed structure. As it is the only one we have, perhaps the only one in the world, it must be placed on the pedestal of reverence it deserves. For us, it is now on a par with St. Peter's in Rome, St. Mark's in Venice, Notre Dame, and yes, even the Mormon Temple in Utah, much as I hated those bigamists. We must preserve our temple, for in it dwells our God, our last hopes of ever becoming a civilized people again. Our philosophical future lies there, for it represents the last vestiges of salvation in this nightmarish aftermath of the greatest holocaust the world had ever known. Have we become so coarse, so inhuman as to destroy the very beliefs that have preserved this far?"

The old man paused, and the silence seemed absolute. He turned slowly and hobbled down the aisle. The chairman rose and attempted to gain control of the assembly during this interlude. His cries and the roars of the group barely touched the ears of the old man as he shuffled from the meetinghouse.

Once outside, the old man began to tell himself again how he would make everything right. "... and grand hotels with golden chandeliers, gold-lined windows, oil masterpieces with gold filigreed frames. The rooms, ah, the rooms would look out on a golden city framed in the finer gold of a waning sunset. Tiny diamonds of light appearing all about as the darkness nears. The most glorious time of day for the greatest city the world will ever know. And, in the exact center of the city, my monument. A memorial to the metropolis I have created, my personal Arc de Triomphe. A great parabola it'll be, unblemished in its golden intensity. It will be famous the world over: the city of the Golden Arch. Stretching across the square, it—"

The old man fell heavily to the ground, his chest having been struck by a lightning bolt of pain. He could barely breathe, so great was the pressure on his chest. His arms clutched at air for a moment, then all was still. A cool breeze moved softly through the ancient ruins, stirring the dust as it went. Tiny whirling eddies of dust swept to and fro inside the pre-war fast-food restaurant, and some debris fell from its once-remembered sign. For here it was that the old man died: Under the Golden Arches.

## ANGER OF A HOUSE

Tamara Jane Engle

Waves thundered and crashed upon the rocks,  
And pounded along the beach  
Salt spray dampened the darkened night,  
And hid the hoot owl's screech.

Hung in the deep black midnight sky,  
The full silver moon glowed blue,  
Shadows were thick atop the cliff,  
And the grass sparkled glass-like with dew.

The house that crowned the towering hill,  
Was ancient and reeked with age,  
Silhouetted in the light of the midnight moon,  
The very house seemed to shake with rage.

Rage that shook its very eaves  
And tremored in the walls,  
Anger that rattled the window panes  
And echoed in the halls.

The house it is said is angry still  
At the deaths of its two young masters,  
A girl of light, a boy of night.  
Whose presences fill the house to the rafters.

The girl of light of day and sun,  
Of flowers, blue skies, and trees.  
Honey-blond hair and eyes of sky,  
The breeze whispered Dawn Marie.

The boy of night, of dark and moon,  
Of stars, black skies and mist.  
Hair of black curls and eyes of black ink,  
Jonathon Drew—A man Satan kissed.

Living on past the deaths of their parents,  
Who died while cruising at sea,  
Jonathon and Dawn remained in the house  
Until their own deaths in 1803.

Dawn never married — nary a young man came near,  
Who wasn't afeared of her brother.  
Jonathon was jealous of attention she paid  
To any man she wanted as a lover.

She desperately tried to break free of his spell,  
And run far from the prison he made,  
To gain for herself some type of life  
Away from the threat of Jonathon's blade.

Finally one night Dawn managed to have  
A young man sneak to her bed,  
After long hours of love with promise of more,  
Dawn awoke to find her love dead.

A look of torment crept into her eyes,  
When she found a note on the sheet,  
The words scrawled wildly in her brother's hand,  
Gave her chills that frosted her heart beat.

"Come at once, Dawn Marie, to my room up the stairs,"  
The bold words commanded her soul,  
And silently, sleeplike, drawn by his spell,  
She left her dead lover—to the stairs she did go.

Climbing the stairs slowly by one,  
Not knowing what fate lay in store,  
Dawn Marie shuddered and shivered with fear,  
When she saw the light 'neath his door.

Barely she touched the solid oak door,  
And slowly it opened full view,  
Framed in the light of the flickering flame  
Was the darkness of Jonathon Drew.

"Come in, sweet sister, I've words I must say,  
I've feelings I must let be known,  
For years I've harbored a desire for you,  
Tho' only a brother's love I've shown."

Dawn's horror grew quickly with each word he spoke,  
She seemed frozen to the spot where she stood,  
Each word he uttered, each truth he muttered,  
Chilled her through—making ice of her blood.

Ever so slowly, he closed the space between them,  
Closer and closer he came,  
She could feel his breath, heavy and hot,  
Hear his lowered voice gasping her name.

Roughly he swept her into his arms,  
Then made his way to the tower,  
Feeling her trembling body in his grip,  
Her fear just increased his power.

Throwing wide the doors of the balcony,  
Dawn and Jonathon were met by the night,  
Haunted by gusting violent winds,  
And shadowed by the moon's cold light.

Dawn escaped from the arms of her wild-eyed brother  
But could not gain her way to the stairs,  
Instead she found a path to the edge of the tower,  
Her dress billowed wildly in the chilled dark air.

"Take one step near me and jump I will,"  
Dawn Marie threatened, her eyes great with fear.  
Closer and closer she was to the edge,  
Jonathon, not heeding her word, took that step near.

A sudden burst of wind came from the east,  
Causing Dawn to lose her footing.

Slowly, feather-like, she fell from the ledge,  
Her golden hair streaming in space,  
Tumbling over and over with grace,  
She landed on the rocks—Jonathon watched from the edge

Feeling the immediately loss of his love,  
And knowing he could not go on,  
Jonathon crying the name of his love—  
He leapt in the light of the dawn.

Years after that night, the house stands alone,  
No one lives inside.  
Still shaking with rage, the house remains,  
On black nights you can hear the house cry.

## IMPROMPTU

Darryl Robert Erlandson

"Hot dogs! Get your hot dogs!" cried the vendor, as he wound his endless way up and down the many aisles of the baseball stadium. Surely this is a scene familiar to almost every American citizen. Yes folks, even before the frost thaws and the lilies bloom, one can hear the satisfying crack of bat meeting ball, the solid thump of ball meeting catcher's mitt. And once again the "Great American Pastime" is under way. But let's look away from the romance of the major leagues—the dazzling splendor of the Babe, the youthful enthusiasm of Reggie Jackson and other immortal greats. Let us turn toward home, in the sand lot across the street, and we will see baseball in its finest moments. We will not see dazzling perfection, nor will we see physical excellence, but we see scores of 42 to 38, twenty-inning games and, most of all, fun. We will see baseball played from the heart rather than the wallet, as it ought to be. So I thought until last summer, when I participated as an assistant coach for a local little League team.

I was appalled by the commercialism of the League. Many people believe that the coaches push the little players too hard. Not so, say I. Win, Win, Win at All Costs was pounded into the minds of the youngsters. And this brainwashing was done by the parents. Coaches were ridiculed for having daily practices of less than three or four hours. In one instance, two mothers began spitting upon the coach of a team opposing their darlings. The players themselves were made jest of by their own parents for having not played up to expectations.

Upon talking to and associating with the players themselves, I found that most of them hated the game. The game dominated their lives by order of their parents. And so ceased to be a game.

I realized then that this was the epitome of the American dream. "Yes, son if you work hard enough you can be anything." This is a favorite and worn-out line of the American parent. Horatio Alger began the idea that if in America a man was unsuccessful, it was due to his slothful laziness, a lack of initiative. Because the American man believed this, the American man was usually unsuccessful: he did not retire at age 40, and did not own the largest Cadillac made. Feeling guilty for this, he'd be damned if it was going to happen to his son. He would teach his son to work, work, work for success. He would not allow his son to make a failure of him a second time.

So parents, when in the future you ask what has become of Johnny—why is his hair so long, his clothes so sloppy—look to yourself, for it is you who have created the American nightmare.

## REQUIREMENTS

Kurt David Gardner

A bell rang in Ron's study, signaling that the mail had been delivered. He stood up, stretching his legs, and walked into the living room. Mike and Jennie, two of his four children, were watching television. Mike gave him a smile, and he returned it.

He stepped out onto the porch and squinted his eyes. Reaching into the mailbox, he pulled out a stack of letters and returned to his study.

The dull yellow color of one of the letters caught his eye, and realizing that it was from the government, he sat down to read it.

*Mr. Ronald Richards, it said. It has been made known to us that your wife has given birth to her fourth child. Surely you are aware that our economic situation cannot tolerate this. Therefore, two of your children are required to be exterminated (H. Law 30C). Please take them to Solitude Hospital, Monday, April 28 at 20° A.M. It will be brief and painless. Our apologies and regrets are extended to you and your family. Thank you, (signed) The House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.*

Ron crumpled the letter in agony. This could not be! He gazed at the trio of photographs on his desk. They were of his children, and tears stung his eyes. Jennie, the eldest, was smiling happily, and Mike and Jarrett, the twins, looked mischievous. How could he choose between these three and the newborn Anne?

Ron tightened his lips. He would not choose, because he would not comply. He grabbed the letter and his car keys, and ran out of the house.

His head throbbed as he sped down the freeway. Seeking something to calm himself, he turned on the car radio. A newsman was speaking: "... and the country is in a horrified uproar as people are receiving letters sentencing their children. Riots have broken out in---"

He shut off the radio, unnerved, and glanced at his watch. Friday, 16<sup>4</sup>:06 it read. He had plenty of time. The regional justice office did not close until 17<sup>5</sup>. Spotting the office, he pulled into the driveway and ran inside.

Several lines of angry people crowded the room. He chose a short line, and stood. Soon he faced a tired-looking secretary. "Name and number please," she said.

"Ron Richards. 14467." He watched her type the information on a telekeyboard, and the screen lit up with a reply.

"Two children, correct?" she asked. Without waiting for a reply, she continued. "I'm sorry, sir. There's nothing I can do. It breaks my heart to have to tell you people this." Her face showed none of the compassion her words implied. "If proper birth control methods had been followed, none of this would have been necessary. I'm sorry, but it's the law."

He frowned. "Is there anyone I can see?"

"Sir--" She sighed and saw his lip tremble. "Well . . . all right. Try Mr. Wood. He's down the hall in room A."

Running to Wood's door, Ron rang the buzzer. A short, plump man with thick glasses motioned him in.

He sat down, waiting for the man to speak, for he knew that the information he had given to the secretary had been transmitted to Wood.

"I'm sorry, sir," Wood began. "I can only tell you again that there's nothing we can do. Rules are rules. If proper birth control--"

"Yes, yes," Ron snapped. "Is there anyone with some power I can see about this?"

"It won't do any good."

"Just tell me who it is."

"Go to the courthouse. See Mr. Jones or Mr. Wright."

Ron stood up, and the man watched pityingly as he left the room.

Inside the courthouse, Ron stood in front of a window. The girl behind it smiled plastically and requested his name. She shook her head when he asked for Mr. Jones, because he had a visitor. She regretted to inform him that Mr. Wright was on vacation.

Angered, he stalked down the hall, ignoring the girl's shouts. He sought Jones' office. Finding it, he burst inside.

Jones and his visitor jumped, startled. "Can I help you?" Jones inquired.

"Pardon my intrusion," Ron smirked. "Two of my children have been ordered to die, and I refuse to go through with it."

"Your name, please?"

"Ron Richards."

Jones smiled with a semblance of pity. "I'm sorry, Mr. Richards. This is a federal law you're dealing with, and it would take months to help you. Even then it probably wouldn't do any good." Every family has to give a bit to keep our country going. We're in such short supply of everything it's impossible to allow large families."

Ron gritted his teeth and blurted, "A bit? Giving your children is giving a *bit*? Do you know what it's like to hear your children must die? To be required to kill them? I don't think so!" He sat down, and the visitor nervously left the room. "Everywhere I've gone today, it's been 'I'm sorry', and 'I can't do anything about it'. Well, I think it's crap! I will not let my children die!!"

Jones pressed a button on his desk. Ron, oblivious to the action, continued. He was becoming insane with fury and he knew it, but he couldn't stop. "You're asking me to kill a child like it's a---a wounded horse or something. I will *not*! You can give me laws and frigging governmental rules all day, but *no* government in the world has the right to murder! That's what you are! MURDERERS!"

The button Jones had pressed had signalled a doctor with a syringe full of sedative to enter the office. The doctor was now approaching Ron from behind, and Jones relaxed noticeably. Several people with Ron's same complaint had come in that day, and they had all been infuriated. Fearing for his life, Jones had the doctor on call. People had threatened him with knives and guns, even pieces of broken glass! Now this man was sitting there, his eyes bulging and his face viciously red. Jones feared that the man would tear him apart with his bare hands!

"You sit there with all the food and money you desire! All you politicians! You're a bunch of fat, lazy sons-of---" Ron felt a tingling sensation in his arm. He turned and saw the syringe that was injecting a sedative into his body. He pulled away, and the needle ripped his flesh.

"MURDERERS!! WHAT HAPPENED TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH? IS THAT WHAT YOU DO TO EVERYONE WITH A LITTLE GUTS? WITH SOME SENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS? GIVE 'EM A DAMN SHOT?" He was dizzy, panicking. "I WON'T TAKE IT! I'll . . . stop . . . you"

He fell to the floor. A stretcher was brought in, and he was taken to a small room with a couch. His wife, Mary, was notified. She hurried to the courthouse and transported him, still unconscious, home.

Dark became light, and he opened his eyes. Jerking slightly, he felt a restraining arm on his shoulder.

"You're home, darling," said Mary.

Bleary-eyed, he looked around the room. "Do you know---"

She nodded, and her long, soft fingers caressed his cheek. "I cried and pleaded with them. I asked them to take me instead. They said, no, I'm needed for the other children. I asked them to take you, believe it or not, and they said there has to be a male head of the household."

A tear coursed down Ron's cheek. "Do the kids know?"

"Jennie and Mike said . . . they'd go," she said meekly. She sounded defeated, like a mother bear in a trap, watching her cubs being butchered by a packing of slavering, wild dogs.

He held her close.

The alarm rang, shattering a dream he had been having. In it, he and his family had been running down a long stretch of beach. Everyone was safe, and there were no agencies or hospitals for miles. The sun shone, and Jennie was smiling, and the twins looked mischievous.

He felt sick. It was Monday, 19°. He had one hour left to be with his children. More important than that, they had one hour left to live!! Sickening bile rose in his throat, but he held it back.

After the car had been parked, the grim, red-eyed family approached Solitude Hospital. Jennie and Mike had to be carried inside, they were paralyzed with fear. Ron left his family in the hall and went to get some information.

"Mom," Mike said, his teeth chattering, "Are you gonna miss us?"

Mary held him tight. "Oh, my God, baby. I love you."

Ron argued with a doctor. "Now I brought them here against my own will, and I'd just as soon see it be over and done with."

The doctor smiled, then retorted, "Children have no real conception of death. They think something painful is going to happen, when in reality -----"

"Bullshit!" Ron snapped. "They're scared as hell-----dying!!"

Jennie tried to be brave, but her face was pale and terror-filled. She watched as child after child entered the hospital. Some were screaming, others were unconscious. Even more pitiful were the smiling children whose parents had kept them from the truth.

Nurses in white wheeled carts bearing syringes for those parents who wished to hold their children while they were put to sleep. Others were led away to cold white rooms.

"Ron, please," Mary whispered. "Let them go away." Jennie and Mike were kissed and caressed for the last time, while priests and other men of God blessed them.

Then they were gone.

The painfully smaller family left the hospital and drove in silence. Mary sniffed occasionally and dabbed at her nose with a wrinkled handkerchief. Ron saw a tollbooth come in view and reached in his pocket to pay the operator the necessary fare to cross the bridge.

They drove mournfully, a single funeral car that had lost the others in the procession. Ron felt Mary's hand on his. She squeezed it tight.

"Drive off the bridge." Her voice was airy.

"What?"

"Drive off! Please, darling!" Suddenly she was wild, kissing him madly, endlessly, and little Anne was awake and screaming, and Jarret in back clutched his seat in fear, and the car crashed through the guardrail and plummeted gracefully into the waters below.

## IMPROMPTU

Julie Marie Gibson

High school: the big step. Maybe one of the biggest steps in my life, for afterward I would never be the same.

These were my feelings as the summer after my eighth grade year came swiftly to a close. As the day to return to school neared, I grew gradually more nervous and unsure about the next four years of my life.

"What would high school be like?" I asked myself. "Could I, a girl who was well-liked by both faculty and students in my small junior high school, ever 'make it big' in a building of almost 1600 strangers? Or would I lose all the respect and admiration and . . . and, yes, even attention I received these past few years?"

Often I would daydream about my high school days ahead. In my dreams I would be active in everything possible: I would be elected president of many clubs, work on the school publication, be in shows and, most importantly, earn good grades. And everyone would know me and what I could do; every teacher and every student would recognize me as they passed me in the hall; and . . .

And yet, I knew it was just a dream. High school would never be like that for me. I'd probably just be another dumb kid. My grades would drop, the clubs would be dull, and no one would know me. "Well, there's one good thing," I told myself. "I'll sure learn to be independent in high school—I'll *have* to be."

Now, as a junior in high school, I realize how wrong I was in my anticipations of "failure." Upon entering the ninth grade, I was accepted warmly by new teachers and made many new friends. It was a new atmosphere, yet it was a good atmosphere; it encouraged me to work and achieve, and I did so, willingly. And my grades, because of this, did not drop but, instead, improved.

I joined clubs that interested me, and although I was not elected president of them, I enjoyed them and learned much through them in the past three years.

I also joined the newspaper staff and last year was asked to be feature/copy editor, a position I thoroughly love and enjoy. I didn't ever appear in any musical production or show; however I did write an act with a friend for presentation on student night — an experience I'll never forget.

In the past three years I have become more independent and I've made many friends. Although *everyone* doesn't know me, it no longer matters anymore, for I have learned something very important here at high school: I have learned that being popular and known by all is not what counts. What really counts is that after you graduate and look back on your past years at school you can say truthfully "Well, I sure had fun and tried my best: I learned, lived, and I grew into a better person."

## THE CONDITIONING OF A MIND (Impromptu)

Patrick E. Gipson

To run long distances takes a measurable amount of stupidity. If a person is endowed with this talent of covering long distances in a relatively short period of time, he is given one of the most destructive curses known by the gods. When I entered this field, still a young boy of ten, my gaze was ever upon the Olympics. It never occurred to me that if I were ever to reach the prestigious status of an Olympic runner, I would have to devote a major portion of my life to working for it. As I grew, my dreams faded as my talent seemed to. It was my entrance into high school, however, which really destroyed my ego and strengthened my wisdom.

In junior high I was a rather successful miler. Soaring above the average runners in my school, I established myself as the best runner there. I came within a few seconds of breaking the school's mile record, consoling myself with the fact that the runner who held it had gone on to unprecedented fame at our high school. With great optimism I arrived at the first practice of the cross-country season. The coach was one of the best in the state, and I knew he would soon have me in shape to run with the varsity. I had not run in three months, yet that was the coach's problem and not mine.

Through the first several weeks I held my own. The others, who had run what seemed to me to be an excessive amount of miles during the summer, were of course doing better than I was. I knew, though, that my talent, however small it was, would soon come through for me. I was slightly worried at the tiredness I felt after the grueling practice, yet I believed that working hard was slowly getting me in shape.

Unfortunately, my asthma condition, which had never been much of a problem before, began acting up furiously. At times I had to cut practices short, which I am sure pleased my coach greatly. I kept falling farther and farther behind in practice. The mental anguish at times was unbearable. Like almost all asthmatics who have a fear of asphyxiation, I also could not bear the thought of being unable to obtain oxygen. My condition was not extremely bad, but the mind can turn small problems into unsurmountable mountains of fear. As the season wore on, I, never being able to push myself hard in practice, fell into a rut of mediocrity. My frustration grew and grew, as each meet I lost to runners whom I had never even worried about the year before. My goal, instead of to run varsity, was now to be on the first team of junior varsity. The words "junior varsity" were very hard on my ego. When a star falls, it leaves a very large crater.

I finished the season in anger and frustration. I felt that my legs didn't care about the rest of me. For the first time, I believed that some of my handicaps were holding me back from what I wanted to achieve. It was

hard to realize then that my mind and attitude could have been responsible for the miserable season. It wasn't that I had been cocky or too proud. It was just that somewhere along the asphalt that I ran, I lost my desire to win, my desire to make myself better. After two more catastrophic seasons, one of track and one of cross-country, I finally shook out of my apathy. When one really wants to make himself better, and looks at all his fraudulent excuses for failure, it humbles him, at the same time that it makes him determined to run someone into the track.

An attitude, a good one, is the most essential ingredient in any undertaking. Sometimes years are needed to rid a mind of weakness and excuses. When I began watching people run, and running myself, I marvelled at the muscles bulging. The arms swinging in metered rhythm with the legs. The conditioning I never saw, though, was the most important. Perhaps it is because the mind does not bulge when it grows stronger; it merely gains a new tenacity, while accepting the role of controlling the body which has up to then controlled it.

## IMPROMPTU

Peri Gruber

There are few happenings in a lifetime which mean a breaking between youth and a tentative advance toward adulthood, between what you were and what you're trying to become. One is the first day of school; another is marriage, still off in the hazy future. Another is a first job. A job means independence. How can anyone consider you a child when you're paying your own way? A job gives you self-assurance. Because someone thought enough of you to give you a job, you're obviously much more intelligent, trustworthy and reliable than the average person. After all, they chose you, didn't they?

That's how I felt when I got my first job, with the amazing wage of \$1.15 an hour. I would be able to buy a car, put myself through college, make a down payment on a new house, and take various cruises and tours around the world. I would become a career woman, dipping my way up the ice cream ladder of success.

It took six months before I realized the bitter truth. I had been cheated and abused, held to a job I didn't like by constant threats of firing by the boss and by my realization that for a fifteen-year-old the job market was limited to this place or others just as bad, if not worse. For the most part I stayed because of greed. Any check, no matter how pitiful, was better than nothing.

I also stayed because of the lingerings of the feelings of independence I'd felt when I'd first started working. I knew what it was like to go and do, all on my own, and I wasn't about to return to the old way of waiting for

sporadic handouts from my mother. The only way to go was straight ahead into the future. To fall back on my parents would be admitting defeat.

Also (but only the tiniest of "also's" I admit) I stayed because of the desire to prove myself. All around me the adolescent employees were dropping like flies—two to three months was their average work expectancy. I dipped and scraped that ice cream; I scrubbed those floors; I worked until midnight or later—this was perseverance; this was endurance; this was TRUE GRIT! Actually, it was blind foolishness. Making myself unhappy for six months only proved that I didn't know my own mind. I was trying to fit the American ideal of the sturdy working class, laughing through clenched teeth into the face of adversity.

In a fit of pique (and because of a hint of a promise of a job at McDonald's) I wrote the boss a fiery denunciation of his business, his employment practices, the ice cream industry, and the personal habits which I found annoying. I felt purged. The bitterness and resentment which had been seething just below the surface had simmered into the perfect blend (like spaghetti sauce) and boiled out into possibly one of the most articulate and profound two-weeks' notices ever written.

That first six-month job was an educational experience, to say the least. I learned that almost *nothing* lives up to the promises it makes—that includes help-wanted ads, cereal boxtop offers, and summer vacations. It's the way of the world. I also discovered that I really had made that final, irreversible step from Mama's protective little circle. When I turned back to my parents for pity and (hopefully) justice against the Big Mean Boss, their only reply was a cluck and a firm push ahead. I found, with a shock, that I was expected to be *responsible* for my actions.

So actually, the job did accomplish its purpose—that of pushing me a little farther along on the journey towards adulthood. Not that I know any more but at least I know I'm supposed to. Maybe I'll be prepared for the next time around.

## SHORT STORY

Bruce W. Humphrey

Vilsech came out of his final hibernation just as the ship came within a light-year of his objective. As he neared, he quietly trained his telescope on the silently rushing planet.

Snow-white clouds swirled across a deep blue background. Grey green, the continents floated amid the other colors. White patches perched at opposite ends of the globe's diameter, ice caps. From behind the planet rose a great silver gem, the world's moon, blazing in the light of the blue sun.

Vilsech sorrowed as he looked at the planet. It was his job to explore and conquer it, but he didn't have to like doing it. The takeover would be little trouble for the Galkorian battle cruiser which he was using, since the

natives were in a primitive, stone-using state. But the death and destruction yet to come weighed heavily on his mind.

He looked away momentarily to correct his instruments, and when he looked back into the eyepiece, a small grey fleck was rising out of the planet's cloud cover. Sunlight glinted off a metallic surface as the thing lifted out of the atmosphere. Vilsech prepared his battle console with one swift, blue-furred hand as he watched the alien ship.

The other ship neared until it filled the telescope's lens. Three spheres, each as big as his own ship, were held gracefully together by long, thin braces, which gently touched their sides and formed them into a triangle. In the center of the triangle hung a needle-thin ship of grey. Dozens of smaller spheres orbited the triangle, in constant motion. The alien was hugely graceful, Vilsech thought, making his own universe-spanning ship look ungainly in comparison.

Knowing that this could not be the ship of any known civilization, Vilsech nervously thumbed on his communicator. The sensor picked up sending waves, but the picture screen held no image, and the speaker hissed and sizzled with hyper-space static. He sent no message himself, for his laser-communicator's beam could be thought of as an attack. Quietly he waited, one eye on the telescope, one on the communicator.

The other ship still neared, and Vilsech had to lower the telescope's power several times until it was only twice normal. He became uneasy when the orbiting spheres slowed and grouped on his side of the alien. Slowly, he moved one hand to the firing switches for his armament. Silently, the spheres approached, blocking his view of the mother-ship.

A computer locked on one of the spheres, and Vilsech flipped a switch. A coruscating beam of fire-orange hell blazed into the sphere, which shattered into molten fragments. The computer found another target, and that sphere too erupted.

Vilsech watched as the other spheres hesitated, then came on once more, still silent but threatening. He wondered what they were doing even as he reached for the firing switch again. Then something nudged his brain.

"Do not harm the Sentinels," said . . . something.

"What are you?" asked Vilsech, his hand still over the lever.

"Ones who will not harm you," came the reply.

Vilsech shrugged mentally and dropped his hand back to his side.

"We did not recognize you as a living mind," continued the alien.

"What are 'we'?" repeated Vilsech.

"Friends," dodged the other. "We wish to help you."

"You know what I am here for?"

"To take over that planet. Yes," replied the thing.

"You will not stop me?" asked Vilsech.

"We . . . cannot," came the answer, in his head. "Our ship has the power, but we will not use it."

"Why?"

"We act merely to better the lives of more primitive beings," said the voice. "We will not harm them. This includes aggressive ones, such as yourself."

"Where do you come from, that you are so superior?" asked Vilsech, feeling slightly insulted.

A brilliant vision instantly filled his head. Beings of pure, sparkling energy coursed through rich lands and beautiful cities. Colors shifted and flowed, like rivers. The sounds of nature were unbroken by those of civilization. Other beings, like himself, walked among the others, welcome visitors.

"We welcome all other intelligent beings," prompted the voice.

"No," whispered Vilsech, out loud. "I have a thing to do."

"One which you know will bring misery and death," said the other sorrowfully.

"It is what I must do." Vilsech felt acute despair.

"We are sorry."

The mind slipped from him, and he was alone again. He shook, as the small spheres returned to the mother ship. Then it too slipped quietly away.

As it disappeared into the blackness, Vilsech again saw the scenery of the alien planet, and so doing, knew their philosophy and ideas. He recalled the harsh military planet which had birthed him and sent him on a mission of destruction. Again he heard the alien's words, "We welcome all other intelligent beings," and knew them to be true. With one last mental shrug, he knew was his decision was.

"I am coming!" he yelled into the communicator and with his mind.

The large Galkorian battle cruiser blazed through space with its full propulsion, pursuing a large, hauntingly graceful ship which slowed to wait for it.

## TWO POEMS

Mike Leslie

### Far Away

On a turbulent day in the windy month,  
The breezes master the light.  
The shades whip and wave  
As if they were sails on the Pinta,  
And I was ready for the New World  
Far from here,  
Far to the west.

Unclothed trees flow in the eddies  
Of the whishing wind.  
Leaves scamper across  
The fields of green  
And come to rest against the blacktop walks,  
Only to become whisked up by a gush of wind  
Far from here,  
Far to the west.

A roaming dog stalks unknown game  
On a sinuous trail  
Passing through wet, red clay.  
Yet no mud cakes slow him  
As he meanders on the path that leads  
Far from here,  
Far to the west.

The grass drifts freely in the gale;  
Dancing waves pass over it,  
Rolling to and fro.  
I look on  
With weeping desire, I look on.  
I, too, want to go  
Farm from here,  
Far to the west.

### Death of Winter

Droplets of rain  
Trickle down  
Crooked paths  
On the smooth face of the window,  
Like tears  
Being shed  
For the coming Death of Winter.  
Crows rough caws  
Are heard  
In solemn harmony  
With the soft call of the wren,  
Quietly mourning  
For the Death of Winter.  
Windblown rain  
Surges down,  
Chilling leaves,  
Making no friends,  
Silently dripping  
To the ground.

## AN ENCOUNTER (Impromptu)

Judy Miller

The burning rays of the hot summer sun fell down upon my back. I ran my fingers slowly through my long blonde hair and, content that not a strand was out of place, I rested my head on my pillow and drifted slowly off to sleep.

At 3:15, unaware of the time that had passed, I was awakened by the strange, eerie feeling that I was being watched. Cautiously, I opened first one eye and then the other. Sitting beside me was a thin young man. He was sitting Indian-fashion, drumming on the sole of his shoe. His dark black hair flowing freely in the breeze, he began to talk to me as though we were close friends.

Awed and impressed by his actions, at 4:00 I accepted an invitation to go for a walk with him. I slipped into my brother's apartment and threw on a clean, oversized T-shirt and a pair of faded cut-off jeans.

For the next few hours we roamed around the apartment complex. As we got farther and farther from the security of home, I began to wonder if accepting the invitation from this stranger had been a good idea. He'd seemed harmless enough at first, talking of school, about where he'd been, about his family—but now his subjects had changed, and for no reason at all a fear was building deep within me.

At 6:37 I told the young man that I had better be returning home. I turned around and began to trace my footsteps back to the apartments.

"Hey, the bike path's a shortcut. Let's take it," he yelled.

I had been on the bike path many times before. It was a strip of concrete about six feet wide bordered by undersized trees and a small stream. It was very secluded and did offer a shorter way home.

So together we walked. Time was passing all too quickly, and night was casting its darkness over the path.

"Y'know, there've been a lot of rapes back here on this path. A couple of young girls were even killed. It has the people with young daughters going crazy. It's supposed to have been some young dark-haired man," he said.

A barrier of fear was growing between us as my imagination ran free. I walked farther away from him. He stared at me with a piercing, evil grin and continued: "I don't have to do things like that. Girls just seem to want me. It would be easy, though, to just move over into these bushes, and no one would ever know, now would they?"

Paralyzed with fright, I stopped and pondered what to do. Maybe he was just talking, but if not, what could I do? I prayed desperately for help.

From the distance there came a voice. Two officers were coming up the bike path toward us.

"Any problems?" one asked.

Choking on his words, my companion answered, "No, my lady and I live in those apartments. We were just taking a walk."

The officer advised us that they were to keep pedestrians off the path in the interest of "safety" and watched us intently until we reached the door to my brother's home. I slammed the door shut and bolted it tightly.

With a sigh of relief, at 7:35 I stretched out on the apartment floor. Perhaps a little wiser. I thanked God I was safe; and I knew next time, if there was a next time, I would be much less trusting of those I did not know.

## VICTORY (Impromptu)

Michael Morris

I arose sleepily from the bed to the prodding chorus of my parents' pleas. Angrily, I shut their voices out of my mind, dreams beckoning me back. However, this was to no avail. I was pushed and pulled up and out of bed and drawn into the land of the awake. Expectations of the day to come formed like mists—to linger, break, then form again. I quickly readied myself and joined the activities of preparation.

This was to be the big trip, an offshore fishing day on an expensive charter boat, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Later, as I watched out the windows of the car heading over the string of bridges that link the tiny islands known as the Florida Keys, possibilities threw out their Siren voices to my imagination. What would happen? A long day of ill-luck, or would I have the favor of the sea and bring home a fine catch? The near-impossible, too, showed its face to me. The chance of catching a sailfish heightened my hopes immensely. A feat such as that would be the ultimate in a fisherman's dreams. The thought of victory over one of the sea's finest creatures drove me on. I even could picture the mounting of such a fish, and my pride at displaying it. The time passed swiftly as I thought of these things, and we were soon aboard the boat and trolling through deep water.

Cronus then slowed his passage for me, and the hot sun shone on the decks of the glistening white craft. I was in one of four chairs on the afterdeck and felt the line tug gently through the outrigger as the seas would swell, then subside. The intense indigo hue of the Gulf Stream in contrast to the gentle breeze of the air drove my eyelids lower. A white gull off the stern melted into billowing clouds behind. The hours drifted by. My mind relaxed.

Suddenly I was pulled from sleepiness as my hand felt the gentle tug on the line change rhythm. My awareness jumped, though I knew not why. Intently I watched the clip on the outrigger. It snapped, and I knew the lull was over. Instantly I was fighting, oblivious to the activities of those around

me. The fish pulled, and I strained at it. Then, without warning, the line went slack, and I thought it was over. The explosion that mounted before my eyes told me differently. A fine sailfish broke water before me, splashing the water in a frenzied attempt to shake off the hook. We melted together into one system of contention, each determined to win what he cherished most at that instant. For him, it was his life. For me, it was him. The minutes slowly trudged by and were blurred by my excitement and intent.

Seemingly hours later, the fish began to weaken, and I reached out for the victory that was mine: a mount I pictured as before with my proud countenance standing beside it. It was all I could think of. And then the battle was over. I pulled him alongside the boat, and we hauled him over the gunwhale. I looked at the long iridescent body, the proud flesh of the defeated creature, and the quiet submissive rhythm of his gills. I turned and said in one breath, "Let him go!"

## IMPROMPTU

Mark Allen Oates

"Hey, Mark, who are you going to take to the prom?"

There it was again, the question that kept pounding in my head. Who am I going to take to the prom? I have to go; there's no way around it. The Junior Class President must go, no ifs, ands, or buts about that.

When I stand back and look at the question objectively, there seems to be no problem. After all, I'm not exactly ugly, I'm intelligent, and pretty popular. So where is the problem?

The problem just walked by. Or I probably should say she just walked by. She is Kay Smith. I don't mean that she's a problem, anything but, but my problems seem to center around her. She's not really pretty, standing about 5'4"; she's not really what you would call well-rounded (take that any way you please) and she's not even really popular. Yet I'm drawn to her. And that's where my troubles begin.

Back in December, my class hosted the annual semi-formal Christmas Dance. As Class President, I was obligated to attend that dance also. No problem, I'll ask somebody. Hey! I know, how about Kay Smith!

"Hi, Kay! Say, are you going to the Christmas Dance? You're not? Would you like to go with me?"

"Oh, well yeah, I understand. It's traditional for you and your family to go to Chicago on that day. All right. Well, thanks anyway."

That was the first time I was ever turned down for a date. Sure, I could understand her reasons. At least I could understand them, until the night of the dance when I saw her with someone else. Oh well, chalk one up for experience.

She later explained the circumstances to me. After I had asked her, her family decided they weren't going to Chicago. By that time I had asked someone else. So when she got asked again she went. I could accept that, I guess. So here it is Prom time and I need a date.

"Hey! How about Kay Smith!"

"I don't know. She turned you down once already."

"Yeah, but she had a good reason."

"Some reason, she went with someone else."

"That was because I already had a date."

"Sure it was."

And so the dialogue pounds back and forth inside my head, ping-ponging from one side of the argument to the other.

Finally, I decide to ask her. I've looked at all the arguments, and I think she'll probably say yes. And yet there is the doubt in my mind that won't go away, the doubt that makes it hard to ask a girl for a date.

I'm going to ask her. I've decided, and I'm going to!

As I walk down the hall before school I see her standing alone by her locker.

"Here's my chance. I'll ask her now."

"You've got three weeks before the Prom; what's the rush?"

"But I want to ask her early, so she can have plenty of time to get a dress."

"But what if she says . . . . ."

Doubt. There it is again. I quickly beat it back into the recesses of my mind and go to class.

Lunch rolls around. There she is standing by herself. Once more I beat back the doubt and start walking toward her. About five feet away, I panic and head for the drinking fountain. I could kick myself! It's not like this is the first girl I ever asked!

The final bell rings, and I start walking toward my locker.

"Hey! There she is! Ask her this time, gutless!"

I walk over to her as cool as I can be, considering WW II is taking place in my stomach.

"Hi, Kay!"

("Hurry up and get it over with, you dummy!")

"Uh, Kay do you want to go to the Prom with me?"

I never really heard the words she said. I didn't need to. The tone said it all. What is said was *NO*! It was a polite no, but nevertheless a definite no.

*Deja vu*. Chalk up another one for experience.

What did I learn from all this? Probably nothing. I'll probably ask her again, and she'll probably say no again. I guess F. Scott Fitzgerald put it best in the *Great Gatsby*:

"So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

## TRAPPED!

Christopher Michael Rigaux

In the view of Stephen Crane, the lives of men and women are determined by exterior factors. We are not the masters of our own destinies in any way, shape, or form. Willpower, personal fortitude, and other virtues of mankind take a back seat to nature, the environment, and the setting. We are mere pawns in the game of life, ruled by these superior forces. We must play out the string of our existence however these variables determine it. Freedom of choice is not within our sphere of power.

Nature is depicted as a mighty force fully capable of deciding the actions of men. Nature is superior to any dissenting actions man might muster up against her. "A gate post, like a still man with blanched face, stood aghast amid this profligate fury," with the same effort on the storm that a man would have ("The Blue Hotel"). Nature reduces man's effort on her to that equivalent of an inanimate object, oblivious to his superior talents. In his short story "The Open Boat," Crane illustrates nature's control over men's actions. She can cause their actions to diminish "because anything resembling an emphatic gesture would capsize this freighted boat," or increase as "gray-faced and bowed forward, they mechanically, turn by turn, plied the leaden oars." Man is quite hapless, "just a wee thing wallowing, miraculously top-up, at the mercy of five oceans" in his struggle with nature. Crane "would conclude that it was really the intention of the seven mad gods to drown him [man], despite" any resistance offered by man. When "it occurs to a man that Nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him," then the influence man has on Nature is described in its barest minimum. "Perhaps an individual might consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature," but even in this, the final bout, she chooses the time and place, and continues to exist even after man has perished.

The environment in which we spent our "golden" childhood days is another influential factor in our lives. If we inhabited an area where "the open mouth of a saloon called seductively to" us twenty-four hours a day, then we had a good chance of being alcoholics (*Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*). In *Maggie*, although the girl "is never considered . . . as a pearl dropped into Rum Alley from Heaven," she "would have been more firmly good had she better known how." But she lived in "a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter," including poor Maggie. Maggie tried to escape her fate. "When she thought of her former Rum Alley environment, she turned to regard Pete's strong protective fists," but even they couldn't save her. Maggie is trapped by the nature of her surroundings. "She did not feel like a bad woman. To her knowledge, she had never seen any better."

She "studied human nature in the gutter" and lived by its example. Crane paints a bleak picture in illustrating the effect an environment can have on a person. "Besides, in his world, souls did not insist on being able to smile."

The third major factor is an intangible facet of life, the actions of men being determined by the setting in which they occur, oblivious of any influence by man himself. Fate is this compelling force which causes the circumstances to result in certain behavior by men. "Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes," but men are not so empowered as to be able to take it away from her ("The Open Boat"). In "A Mystery of Heroism," Collins reacted as if he were a robot, unable to think or reason, when thrust into a given situation. He is "mostly surprised" by his heroic undertaking, not a master in control of his actions. It wasn't until Collins was at the well that "the great terror struck, clawing at his stomach," which probably was his natural instinct. If he had been in control before, it probably would have hit him sooner. An argument leads Johnny to say in "The Blue Hotel," "'then, we must fight,'" as if they had no choice in the matter. In the same story, Crane uses the cowboy and the Easterner to illustrate that "a thousand things might have happened," but they couldn't determine the chosen path. Again, the gambler's reaction to the Swede's vulgar action is to kill him, yet the gambler was described as "an upright and [morally] outstanding member of the community." It simply wasn't within his power to decide his course of action. In "The Blue Hotel," "Every sin is the result of a collaboration" — a collaboration of nature, the environment, and the setting, according to Stephen Crane.

## A STAR IS BORN

Kathy Lee Sands

Journal Entry: February 2, 1977

It was worth going to class today! As I was taking an exam in Mrs. Tuggle's class, Mrs. T. stopped by my desk—as she often does—and informed me that I had been selected to represent Reitz High on a Channel 9 televised discussion of *Roots*. While I was inwardly delighted by the chance to become an overnight celebrity, I managed to hide my true feelings and to preserve my usual air of controlled debonair sophistication. As I recall, I looked up, arching my right eyebrow and cocking my head to the side, and said, "Oh, really? How nice." Mrs. T., seemingly startled by the cool response, moved off, somewhat befuddled, to resume her patrol of the class. I don't think she saw me drop my pen on the floor as she turned away, but I fear she may see through my facade when she reads my paper and discovers the

three sentence fragments I wrote in a row. But who cares? In a week I'll be seen on screens in thousands of Evansville living rooms. In a few years I may monopolize T.V. screens across America. Move over, Farrah Fawcett! Get back, Sonny and Cher! And look to your laurels, Mary Tyler Moore! Kathy Sands is on her way!

Journal Entry: February 6, 1977

The last four days since Mrs. Tuggle unwittingly launched my new career have been incredibly hectic. Desiring to be the instant hit of the show, and perhaps of the season, I have bent every effort to research my topic and to interview my fellow students about their views on *Roots*. As I understand it, most of the panel will be composed of adults, with only two or three high school students on hand to give youth's impressions of the story. Doubtless my contemporaries will be full of insights worthy of Shakespeare and Freud, but they will have to be to keep up with me. My copy of *Roots* is in tatters from my frenzied perusal, my notebook is bulging with reviews of both the book and the film, and my cassette tapes contain over two hours of interviews on the subject. In short, no effort has been spared to make me an instant authority on Kunta Kinte and his descendants and a mighty force to be reckoned with on the upcoming panel discussion. I'm so full of facts and opinions that I'm like a volcano about to erupt or, better yet, like a star about to be born. With all this preparation and a bit of luck I shall dominate the conversation, captivate my fellow panelists and the audience, and have movie producers fumbling for their contracts.

Journal Entry: February 9, 1977

Today's debacle at Channel 9 was the absolute nadir of my acting career. I now distrust all adults in general and loathe history professors in particular! But perhaps a brief explanation is in order to show that I was badly abused and my stock of knowledge all but untapped at this afternoon's charade. I am definitely not paranoid, for my raging anger is but a mild response to the series of ego-shattering provocations which I endured from sundry foes.

My arrival at the Channel 9 studio at 3:45 P.M., instead of 4:01 P.M., thanks to my dad's impossible penchant for punctuality, deprived me of a chance to make a breathless late entrance. The taping session was supposed to begin at 4:00 P.M., but "due to technical difficulties" we did not begin until 5:30 P.M. or so. During that endless hour and forty-five minutes I got to know the other seven panelists, only one of whom was a high school student. He was a tall, good looking black youth named Eric who was supposed to sit beside me so that the "young people" would be together. For the rest, four were black gentlemen, another white lady of fifty or so with back problems, and the last an insufferable history professor desperately

bent on showing the world that he knew only slightly less than God. By the time the show actually began I sensed that while the members of the black community were genuinely interested in what Eric and I thought about *Roots* and local problems in the schools, Mrs. Aguecheek was more concerned with when the numerous aspirins she had consumed would take effect, and Professor Solemnshow could find no reason for our existence whatever.

At length we were escorted into the studio and assigned seats. Eric and I were placed up front closest to the cameras, but once the others were seated it quickly became apparent to the cameramen that Eric's huge Afro was blocking out too many panelists and he was shunted to the rear. At this point fate dealt me a low blow, for when Eric moved to the rear Professor Solemnshow bolted to the front and seized Eric's vacant seat. He sank into it with a sigh of satisfaction, his three hundred pounds filling the seat and spilling over the edges. His beady eyes peered at first one camera and then the other as if he were deciding which one would show his profile to best advantage. Between us there was a microphone which we were supposed to share, but with Moby Dick beside me I was almost totally eclipsed.

The moderator introduced each of us in turn, managing as he did so to mispronounce my name and assign me to a high school other than the one I attended, and then directed his first question to me. I beamed at the camera and waited for the professor to pass me the microphone so I could answer, but he was staring absently at a remote corner of the ceiling and was, of course, totally unaware of my need. I leaned toward him and said, "Professor, may I have the mike, please?" Startled by my intrusion into his universe, the professor reached into his lap for the mike and handed it to me reluctantly, as though it were a treasured possession he hated to part with. He gave me a fond look such as Santa Claus gives a tiny child he's bestowing a present upon, then squinted rapidly at both cameras as he tried to decide which one was live. Although I was annoyed at his boorish response, I decided to make the best of the situation and tried to ignore him completely as I responded to the question the moderator had asked. But Professor Solemnshow was not content to leave me alone, for as I spoke he would occasionally tap his nose with a forefinger, sigh or snort loudly, or utter unsettling statements like "Bosh!" and "Utter nonsense!" While it was difficult to ignore his criticism gracefully, I persevered and managed to finish my observations with some merit. The discussion then shifted to panelists on the other side of the room and gave me a chance to glare furiously at Moby Dick while we were momentarily off camera.

For the space of perhaps ten minutes Eric and the others gave random opinions about *Roots*, but then Professor Solemnshow got the floor, spread himself across it and covered it utterly, and proceeded to devour the next thirty minutes with ponderous opinions and pontifical utterances, few of which had anything to do with Kunta Kinte in particular or *Roots* in

general. Moby Dick was sounding, and as he plunged deeper into the murky depths of historical facts the evolution of Kunta Kinte's descendants became hopelessly intertwined with such odd things as Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt and the burial practices of the ancient Egyptians. Before long the moderator was fuming, and the rest of us were squirming in our seats, as we all wondered how in the world to turn this encyclopedia computer off—permanently. Eric was making rude noises from the rear, and Mrs. Aguecheek, racked by unbearable pain and boredom, kept saying, "Oh, my God! Oh, dear Lord! Will it ever end?"

In desperation the moderator finally plucked the microphone from Professor Solemnshow's sweaty grasp and gave it back to me for a final comment. Outraged beyond belief, I answered as best I could, my voice cracking with emotional frustration, and then, mercifully, the show ended. My debut as a T.V. personality was over, and as far as I was concerned Johnny Carson could take over from there. What I had to say was best left unsaid, and after saying a brief goodbye to the moderator and six of my co-panelists, I fled into the night.

#### Journal Entry, February 15, 1977

The program was shown last night at 11:00 P.M., a little after the family viewing hour, especially for the educational channel. Mysteriously, the program began at the middle of our discussion, a bit after the learned professor of history had taken control of the microphone. At first I thought that what I had said was so valuable and so profound that they were saving me for the conclusion of the show. Unfortunately, those preposterous bumpkins, unable to distinguish between true diamonds and lumps of lead, deleted everything of incisive value which I had to say and exhibited all too much of the bumbling historian's frothy mouthings. Thus, though my radiant young face shone briefly on the flickering screens of Evansville, I fear TV in America has suffered an irrevocable loss.

### IMPROMPTU

Tabitha J. Sparkes

Traveling and meeting new people are two of my favorite pastimes. I haven't been many places, but I don't think any location in the world could top our own national capitol, Washington, D.C.

All the credit for my visit goes to my sister, Lisa. Knowing of my love for travel, she sent me a plane ticket and a request for my presence in Washington. I imagined it flowing with big business executives and Watergate tapes.

When I arrived at the Washington National Airport, the hustle and bustle captivated me. Representatives of almost every nationality were lounging around the building. I expected Ford to come through the door. Instead I spotted my sister, waving madly behind a flock of foreigners. My culture-enriched visit had officially begun.

First, on the agenda of "things to do" was a visit to King Tut. My sister explained that he would only be in the States for so long, and that we should see him while he was in town. I readily agreed. After all, it would save me a trip to Egypt.

The following morning we were off to a section of the Smithsonian where King Tut's treasures were being displayed. The line of people who were on the same agenda as us was atrocious. It averaged out to about four city blocks. We headed for the back of the line, only because our minds were hungry for culture.

Lisa volunteered to hold my place in line while I peeked into the National Archives building that was across the street. Before I romped off she gave me a brief introduction to the Archives, the place where all important written history is kept.

Because of my love for writing I could sense that this was the place for me. Once inside I was utterly amazed at the "original" doctrines, compromises, and letters. I hardly believed that an hour ago I didn't even know the building existed.

The most impressive item was not, to me, the Louisiana Purchase on paper or the barely legible Constitution of the United States, but the small, fairly new addition to the Archives. It was a little piece of paper that read something like this:

Dear Sirs,

I do hereby resign as President of the United States.

Sincerely,

Richard M. Nixon

This was a portion of history that had happened in my own lifetime, and the realization of that fact hit hard. At that moment I was sorrowful, understanding all the pain and agony Mr. Nixon must have gone through.

I went to see King Tut, experiencing a touch of ancient Egypt, but to witness a part of new history, like that at the National Archives Building, moved a different part of me. It was a piece of our culture that I will never forget because I lived it, and it has, in a small way, affected my whole life.

## IMPROMPTU

Louis Scott Warren

I was on the floor and getting dressed as soon as the alarm rang, much more quickly than I had ever done when a quick trip to school was the only prospect that greeted my awakening. I dressed quickly and warmly: two pairs of socks, thermal underwear, etc.; my father had promised me that the fields and woods would be very cold this early.

A dizzying feeling of exuberance encompassed me as I prepared myself for the wilderness. To hunt! To stalk the wooded ways like an elusive panther, to be as one with the older men, to carry and discharge a gun. How often I had longed to accompany my father when he would leave with my uncle to trek through the early dawn mist. It seemed to me the epitome of manhood: to hold the power of life and death over every creature in sight.

The drive to the preserve was a long one, and I was boisterous and anxious the entire trip. The men exchanged old hunting anecdotes, freely imparted advice to one another, and warned me once again that, although I would be cold and wet with dew, still I must walk at a pace to keep up with their longer legs. As they talked, the thought that they had done this before, had experienced this all before numerous times, filled me with jealousy. Why must life be so short, I wondered, that one could not be allowed throughout eternity? I wished to spend the rest of my life at the hunt, stalking and shooting.

I was filled with impatience as we arrived at the preserve and waded through the red tape at the registration building. Then, almost too soon, we were off. We parked at the side of an old dirt road and plunged into the forest. The sights, the sounds, the smells, all were as I had imagined them. I was so happy I could hardly contain myself. The feel of the gun in my hands gave me immense pleasure.

We walked all through the morning, seeing not one living creature save a few winter birds, and still my ecstasy had not worn off. As the men had told me, I was wet, cold, and tired; yet I was willing to continue all day, all week, all year. We made our way back to the car, ate the few odds and ends we had stored there, and recommenced.

Ten minutes passed. We entered an old, dead corn field. Suddenly, just before us, an enormous flock of game birds rose, darkening the sun. Even as other men were firing, I raised my gun, hurriedly unfastening the safety, and fired.

Although birds were dropping all around, I knew the one I had hit. I saw it as it stopped dead still in mid-air and dropped without movement, like a stone. It is hard to describe the furious surge of joy I felt as the gun jerked back into my shoulder, and the animal, my target, fell beneath my onslaught.

Yet the bird had uttered a cry.

It was a cry such as I had never heard before, and without any conscious force of my own will, gave pause to my elation. I walked ahead with the men to where the creatures had fallen, and knew mine no matter how much it resembled the others.

It lay there, in its own blood, yet it lacked the majestic romance of men that died in their own blood in movies. It simply lay there, blood oozing out of its many wounds and staining its feathers. It reminded me of pictures I had seen of actual battlefields shortly after a struggle. The men who had lain there had also lacked the noble repose of fiction. Could this actually be what we had sought to do? Had we fatigued ourselves all morning, simply to bring destruction to this small, unmenacing animal? How cruel would we be, to slay an innocent without exertion. How much crueler, low sadistic, we were to put forth great physical effort, at our own expense, just to needlessly murder.

At once, all my exuberance and elation left me, and I turned to go.

## THE DEVIL'S MESSENGER

David Alan Wickizer

Ebenezer Turwill was afraid of dying. He had had an abnormal fear of dying since he was a young boy. Growing old held a horror for him that cannot be described by mere words.

On April 17, 1775, Ebenezer Turwill was afraid of something else. He was afraid of a war that might get him killed. There were rumors that the British might attack Concord or Lexington, which frightened Ebenezer even more. He lived in Lexington.

Ebenezer paced the floor of his living room, trying to think of a way to make sure he would be safe. He went to the window and looked out. They could come right down this very street. He looked up and down the street half expecting to see them. His eyes fell on a house that stirred up old memories. That is where the old slave used to live. She used to tell the village children wild tales of people that made pacts with the Devil. He felt a pang of regret that she had been hanged before he could ask her how to do it.

He remembered part of what she had said, so he got a piece of chalk and drew a circle with a star inside on the floor. He racked his brain trying to think of the words that go around the outside of the circle. He just couldn't remember. All at once, he felt an over-powering urge to go to his bookcase and reach for his Bible. As he held the Bible, it fell open to "the temptation of Jesus." Marking the place was a piece of paper with a tentagram drawn upon it. On close inspection, he could see some very faint writing around the outside of the circle. "Maybe I'm getting outside help," he thought.

At twelve midnight on April 18, 1775, Ebenezer Turwill was kneeling in the middle of his pentagram, reciting the words written around the outside of it. Suddenly, there was a flash of red light, and a smell of brimstone filled the room. There before Ebenezer stood a being that was red from head to foot. He had horns on his head, a pointed tail, and held a trident in his hand.

The being looked around him and said, "Hey, man. What's happening?"

"Pray, sir. I do not understand thee," said Ebenezer.

"Huh?" said the being, looking puzzled. "What year is this?"

"It is the year of our Lord, 1775," responded Ebenezer, obediently.

The being grimaced and said, "Did you have to recite the entire phrase? Well, no matter, I am truly sorry, dear sir, if my speech confused you. I thought I was being summoned to 1975, 200 years from now."

"Are you the Devil?" asked Ebenezer, with a look of childlike incredulity on his face.

"Oh no, my good man, I am Mephistopheles, the messenger of the devils."

"Devils? I thought there was only one Devil."

"Oh my, no. There are five of them." He held up his hand and used his fingers to count. "There's Lucifer, Satan, Astaroth, Beherit, and Beezlebub. I am from the working class of Hell, what you might call a 'lesser demon', along with Belial, who guards the gate to Hell. Belial is rather stupid and I hate him, but then I hate everybody. That's what's fun about it. Now my two-penny lecture is over. Is there anything else you want, or can I go create a little hell for somebody else?"

"I want to make a pact with the Devil."

"Ah, now you're talking. I'm not supposed to sway you one way or the other," said the demon, inserting his arm between the prongs of his trident and leaning on it. His voice took on a note of confidence, "But you do realize that the devils always win in the end, don't you?"

"They won't win out over me in the end, because there isn't going to be an end. I want to live forever."

"Oh ho! Aren't you the tricky one!"

The demon snapped his fingers, and on the table beside Ebenezer appeared a piece of parchment, a silver knife, and a quill pen.

"Use the knife to prick your finger and dip the quill in your blood. Then sign the contract."

Just as Ebenezer completed his signature, he felt a surging current rage through his body. Mephistopheles picked up the parchment and uttered the correct curse, causing it, along with the knife and quill, to disappear.

"Very well, Ebenezer Turwill, you are now immortal."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Miph . . . , Mr. Mes . . . , Mr. Mephst . . . , Mr. Demon. I thought both parties had to sign a contract to make it valid."

A nasty smirk spread across the demon's face. "You have my signature, Ebenezer Turwill. Sit down."

Ebenezer walked to a chair and sat down, only to jump up with a startled cry of pain.

"There is my signature, Ebenezer Turwill: a boil which will never heal. I hope you enjoy living forever." With these words there was a flash of red light and the smell of brimstone, and when the smoke cleared, the demon was gone.

Ebenezer was suddenly very tired. He walked over to his bed and sank into it, being careful to avoid touching the boil. He slept through the day and the following night, awakening on the morning of April 19, 1775. He felt that all was right with the world and always would be.

When Ebenezer went to his carpenter's shop to open for the day, he learned that the British were approaching the town. Assured that he could not die, he ran home and took his blunderbuss off the wall above the fireplace. After a few seconds delay in loading the ancient weapon, he was off to the village green to await the enemy.

The British drew up, facing the steadfast colonists. The order was passed down, "Dispense, ye rebels!" Shots were exchanged, and the colonists retreated, leaving behind eight dead and ten wounded. One of those left for dead was Ebenezer Turwill. A British musket ball had broken his neck and severed his spinal cord. He looked up and saw Mephistopheles leering at him. "I've been cheated," he croaked.

"Have you now?" The demon produced the contract. "It says here you are never to die. However, it says nothing about not being injured. Or, for that matter, having your body appear dead while, in fact, you live on and on and on — forever. I'm afraid, my good man, that what has happened is well within the bounds of the contract. Your wish was to live forever, and you will." He raised his trident high in the air, gave out a devilish laugh and vanished.

Later, when the townspeople came out to bury their dead, they found Ebenezer Turwill lying on the hard ground, to all outward appearances, dead. They were so moved by this unexpected display of patriotism from a man that was so afraid of dying that they paid for a special grave in the very center of the cemetery and erected a large granite headstone.

If you ever happen to walk through the old cemetery in Lexington, Massachusetts, think kindly of the man that lies beneath your feet . . . alive.